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SUBJECT: OMAN: RESPONDING TO PRESS ANTI-SEMITISM

REF: MUSCAT 080; MUSCAT 829

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Two incidents over the past month have spurred post to protest anti-Semitic content in the Omani media. On July 29, state Arabic daily "Oman" carried an editorial, "Jews and Normalization Sacrifices," and on August 24, youth-oriented private Arabic daily "Al Shabiba" included a news-agency supplied article, "The Battle of Bani Al Nadir" in a special Ramadan supplement. In response, post sent letters expressing distaste and indignation and, following earlier precedent (Ref A), sent them via diplomatic note, highlighting how such content serves as fodder for Embassy reporting on human rights and religious freedom. No responses have been received or, based on earlier examples, are expected. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) As reported in Ref B, "Oman" - with at least tacit permission from the Omani government, as the state dailies receive close supervision - on July 29 carried a highly uncharacteristically harsh column rejecting normalization with Israel in light of "heinous crimes against Palestinians and the people of Gaza." The column moved well beyond political discourse on the subject, decrying those "who think they are the chosen ones and have killed prophets and altered the words of Allah and have perpetrated lies."

¶3. (SBU) The Embassy responded with a letter from the CDA to CEO of the Oman Establishment for Press, Publications and Advertisement, noting that such inflammatory content is "strongly at variance with the constructive role that His Majesty's government has historically played in regional issues, that of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict included."

¶4. (SBU) As is standard practice with such responses, the letter was sent via diplomatic note, providing an opportunity to remind the MFA that this is "the kind of material which, at the direction of the United States Congress, the Embassy is obligated to discuss in public documents such as the annual worldwide country reports on Human Rights and Religious Freedom."

¶5. (U) On August 24, the private Arabic "Al Shabiba" published an eight-page supplement, "Anwar Ramadan" ("Ramadan Lights") that featured varied, mostly positive, content about the month, its celebrations, religious obligations, and other holiday-related material. Included, however, was an article, attributed to the Arab Press Agency, headlined "The Battle of Bani Al Nadir." The article discusses, in distorted and inflammatory terms, an episode in the life of the Prophet involving the Jews of Medina. The "history" opens with ugly anti-Semitic rhetoric, language which is reiterated at the conclusion:

"... Jews, throughout history, have been treacherous, back-stabbing and unfaithful ... Jews are brought up on treason and unfaithfulness, in addition to being cowards and hiding behind fortifications. The story of the Bani al-Nadir battle illustrates the aforementioned and details how Muslims are always fulfill their part in agreements... [at the conclusion, with the above repeated:] This battle explains what we are witnessing today."

16. (SBU) Post responded with a letter from the CDA to the paper's Editor in Chief, again presented via diplomatic note, decrying the article's inclusion in a celebration of the holy month and saying that it "appeals to the lowest common denominator of public discourse and reinforces prejudices that have no place in the world today."

16. (SBU) COMMENT: "Al Shabiba" has in recent years been, in Omani terms, comparatively progressive and is home to several of the country's best younger journalists. It is, however, owned by the same family as the English "Times of Oman," whose patriarch (author of the column in Ref A) is noted for his intemperate, at times anti-Semitic writings. The creators of this special supplement likely found this column, perhaps online, and printed it assuming it would meet with their employer's approval.

17. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: While post does not expect a reply, either from the newspaper or the MFA, responding to such occurrences in the local media both puts the paper involved no notice and reminds the MFA that such language is bound to reverberate in post's annual reporting. The three separate events to date this year to which post has had to respond are troubling individually, but are not enough taken together - yet - to indicate that anti-Semitism in general in Oman is seriously worsening. END COMMENT.

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